Pregnant women gaze at the precious things their souls are set on: Perceptions of the pregnant body in early modern literature

‘“Pregnant Women Gaze at the Precious Things Their Souls are Set On: Perceptions of the Pregnant Body in Early Modern Literature

As discussed in the previous chapter with regard to the play *The Birth of Merlin*, the performance of pregnancy is a trope which is well-used in dramatic works. As Kathryn M. Moncrief has noted, ‘In Shakespeare’s plays alone, from the unfortunate Jacquenetta to the groaning Juliet, from Helena to Hermione, Tamora to Thaisa, teeming women are numerous’.[1] Scholarship on this topic has shown that there are a number of thematic ways that pregnancy is used within the plot of a play.[2] Pregnant characters are used to explore issues such as infidelity, concealed pregnancy, female duplicity, and unmarried pregnancy, for example. [3] All these themes have a common thread founded in a distrust of women and the secrets their bodies can conceal: as Laura Gowing has put it, ‘the pregnant belly remained in many ways an opaque mystery’, and this mystery allows other discourses to gain momentum.[4] As late as the end of the eighteenth century (and indeed in all times before modern stenography), as Joanne Begiato shows in her chapter in this volume, pregnancy could be perceived as hosting an ‘invisible stranger’ within the woman’s body, the true nature of whom would only be revealed at birth. In relation to pregnant fictional characters, Susan Wiseman has suggested that the best way to gain the most full understanding of a theatrical text, and therefore the implications of the presentation of a pregnant character, is to compare ‘the play with other texts in a similar field’ with the view that ‘evidence from texts in a similar field help to illuminate the script of the play’ because without explanation from

[1] Kathryn M. Moncrief, ‘Show me a child of thy body which I am father to’: Pregnancy, Paternity and the Problem of Evidence in *All’s Well that Ends Well*, in *Performing Maternity in early Modern England*, ed by Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), pp. 29-45 (pp. 29-30).
[2] Particularly relevant here are a number of chapters in the edited edition cited above *Performing Maternity in early Modern England*, ed by Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), which includes sixteen chapters on various aspects of pregnancy and maternity in Renaissance drama; Monika Karpinska, ‘Early Modern Dramatizations of Virgins and Pregnant Women’, *Studies in English Literature*, 50.2 (2010) 427-444; Teresa D. Kemp, *Women in the Age of Shakespeare* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC, 2010); Carol Levin and John Watkin, *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1997); Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*; Susan J. Wiseman, ‘*’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*: Representing the Incestuous Body in *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c 1540-1660*, ed. by Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn (London: Reaktion, 1995), pp. 180-197.
[3] Some examples of these themes are the exploration of infidelity with characters such as Hermoine in *A Winter’s Tale* (1623), and Arabella in John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1633); women’s capacity to fake a pregnancy such as in *Henry IV*, part 2 (1623)where Doll Tearsheet is accused of using a cushion to feign a pregnancy in order to resist arrest; and the cushion is an idea which appears again in John Dryden’s *The Wild Gallant* (1663); infertility in plays such as *The Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1630) which is resolved by infidelity; *All’s Well that Ends Well* famously has Bertrum being tricked into impregnating Helena; illegitimacy such as in *Measure for Measure;* and hidden pregnancies such as in the John Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi* (1623) and Robert Wild’s *The Benefice A Comedy* (1689).
[4] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 112.

'script, set and costume' taken as a whole 'the body of a pregnant woman cannot be fully "read" either by the figures on stage or the audience'.[5] As will be demonstrated in this Chapter, this methodology can illuminate the way that pregnancy is to be read in other literary works too. The rest of this chapter, therefore, seeks to build on this existing work, but to keep the focus on the ways that pregnancy was presented in works which were not primarily designed for the public stage, such as privately commissioned playlets, along with prose and poetic works, in order to evaluate the extent to which contextual reading reveals in greater depth themes prevalent in dramatic works and the extent to which the themes overlap within these genres.

In Letter XLVII of *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664), Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, discussed the odd behaviour of a young, newly married gentlewoman, who was apparently displaying symptoms of a putative pregnancy. *Sociable Letters* is a series of fictional epistolary correspondence designed to offer advice in a range of scenarios. The letter describes how

> Th' other day the Lady *S. M.* was to Visit me, and I gave her Joy, she said she should have Joy indeed if it were a Son, I said, I bid her Joy of her Marriage, for I had not seen her since she was a Wife, and had been Married, which was some four weeks ago, wherefore I did not know she was with Child; but she rasping wind out of her Stomack, as Childing-Women usually do, making Sickly Faces to express a Sickly Stomack, and fetching her Breath short, and bearing out her Body, drawing her Neck downward, and standing in a weak and faint Posture, as great bellied Wives do, bearing a heavy Burden in them, told me she had been with Child a fortnight, though by her behaviour one would not have thought she had above a Week to go, or to reckon.[6]

Lady S. M. had only been married a month but was ostentatiously deporting herself as if she was in the last stages of a pregnancy. Even in this opening few lines, two important points have been raised: the customary wishes for a male baby, and the conflation of the sickness more commonly associated with early pregnancy than late, along with the shortness of breath commonly seen in late pregnancy. The observation that Lady S. M. is carrying her burden heavily is early modern phrasing for suggesting that birth is imminent. It is seen, for example, in Samuel Rowley's history play, *When You See me You Know Me* (1633) which depicted the entry of Queen Jane, directly following her husband 'Harry the Eight', and how she was 'bigge with Childe'. The King warns Queen Jane's attendants: 'Ladies, I feare shele wake ye,

[5] Wiseman, *''Tis Pity She's a* Whore', p. 196.
[6] Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London: William Wilson, 1664), p. 94.

yer be long, / Me thinkes she beares her burthen verie heavily'. [7] It is clear that Lady S. M. was copying the behaviour of women around her in late pregnancy to validate her newly acquired status as a married woman. The letter continues:

> But she is so pleased with the Belief she is with Child (for I think she cannot perfectly Know her self, at most it is but breeding Child) as she Makes or Believes her self Bigger than she Appears, and says, she Longs for every Meat that is Difficult to be gotten, and Eats and Drinks from Morning till Night, with very little intermission, and sometimes in the Night; whereupon I told her, if she did so, I believ'd she would be bigger Bellied and greater Bodied, whether she were with Child or not; besides Eating so much would make her Sick, if she were not with Child; she answer'd, that Women with Child might Eat Any thing, and as Much as they would or could, and it would do them no Harm.[8]

Cavendish described Lady S. M.'s elaborate performance as following the signs of pregnancy which were common knowledge and set out in contemporary midwifery guides, but how she is acting against the advice of guides. Writing contemporaneously in her 1671 midwifery guide, Jane Sharp described the management of a woman during pregnancy and acknowledged that some pregnant women have greater appetites at this time and that while 'many women have no stomach, others have a very large Appetite; and sometimes a desire to eat strange things, not fit for Food'.[9] However, Sharp was clear that 'There is nothing better after conception, to prevent abortment [spontaneous abortion or miscarriage] than good natural food moderately taken, and to use all things with moderation, to avoid violent passions, as care, and anger, joy, fear, or whatsoever may too much stir the blood'.[10] As Cavendish's letter wryly observed, anyone eating like Lady S. M. would be liable to gain weight in any event, and so such growth cannot be taken as a marker of pregnancy. As Cavendish pointed out, a month from a wedding was too soon to know with any certainty that a woman had conceived. For the young wife though a quick conception would prove to those around her that her marriage was well-favoured; as Juliet Dusinberre has put it, 'Fertility provided proof of the blessedness of marriage' and this sort of legitimating was perhaps important to women like Lady S. M..[11]

Put upon husbands

[7] Samuel Rowley, *When You See Me, You Know Me* (London, 1605).
[8] Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, pp. 94-5.
[9] Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book* (London: Simon Miller, 1671), p. 334.
[10] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 224.
[11] Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 49.

The idea that pregnant women expected to be spoilt by their husbands is an enduring stereotype presented too in the anonymous 1603 prose work, a translation of an earlier French text, and now ascribed to Thomas Dekker, *The Batchelars Banquet* which vividly described the horror of married life for the benefit of young men. In texts such as these, young wives are routinely depicted performing their pregnancies in ways that show them to be childish and demanding. Chapter 3 'The Humour of a woman lying in Child-bed' narrates how a young husband was sent on endless errands to fetch 'strange and rare things, which whether they can be had or no, yet she must have them'.[12] He was sent to buy cherries even at the vast cost of ten shillings a pound, and to ride into the country in search of 'green codlings [apples]' even though they were 'scarcely so big as a scotch button'. The exotic nature of the young wife's demands is similar to the episode in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* in which the Countess of Vanholt requested a dish of ten ripe grapes for which she has a pregnancy craving but cannot obtain because they were not in season. Faustus sends Mephistopheles to obtain them on the grounds that it is summer somewhere in the world.[13] As Eleanor Hubbard has explained, citing William Gouge's conduct tracts on marriage, pregnancy cravings were taken seriously because of genuine beliefs that women could die from unsatisfied desires.[14] Equally it was thought that unfulfilled cravings could damage the foetus. What is clear from these examples, though, is the assumption that women might have overstated their longings in the expectation that their husbands would not want to risk the pregnancy by not fulfilling their every whim. So while the difficulty of supplying the Countess of Vanholt's cravings is exaggerated for dramatic effect, a similar trope of women as unreasonable and yet vulnerable in the pregnant state is played out in these prose works.

For Cavendish, however, Lady S. M.'s attention-seeking behaviour was at the crux of her complaint and she broadened the discussion to women in general:

> But I have observ'd, that generally Women take more Pleasure when they are with Child, than when they are not with Child, not onely in Eating more, and Feeding more Luxuriously, but taking a Pride in their great Bellies, although it be a Natural Effect of a Natural Cause; for like as Women take a greater Pride in their Beauty, than Pleasure

[12] Thomas Dekker,*The Batchelars Banquet* (London, 1603), sig B4.
[13] Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays: Tamburlaine, Parts I and II; Doctor Faustus, A- and B-Texts; The Jew of Malta; Edward II*, ed by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford Worlds Classics, 2008), p. 174 (4.1).
[14] Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 160.

> or Content in their Virtue, so they take more Pride in Being with Child, than in Having a Child.[15]

Cavendish never had children herself despite consulting royal physician, Sir Thomas Mayern, for her 'barrenness'.[16] She was treated with iron supplements, or 'steel waters' to try and stimulate menstruation. It is therefore tempting to infer that this ostentatious display of pregnancy in a young newlywed was painful for Cavendish, especially since the *Letters* were published as Cavendish was in her early forties, married to a man in his seventies, and she would have been alert to the diminishing probability that she would be a mother. This possibility is enhanced by Cavendish's raillery against women who took pleasure in preparing their layettes, nurseries, and enjoying the experience of pregnancy. But equally the description of the fictional young woman has all the hallmarks of irritation at the silly behaviour of young women who use pregnancy as an opportunity to indulge in spoilt and ultimately harmful behaviour:

> they are Prouder, and take more Pleasure in Being with Child, and in Lying in, than in Having a Child, is their Care, Pains, and Cost, in Getting, Making, and Buying Fine and Costly Childbed-Linnen, Swadling-Cloths, Mantles, and the like; as also fine Beds, Cradles, Baskets, and other Furniture for their Chambers, as Hangings, Cabinets, Plates, Artificial Flowers, Looking-glasses, Skreens, and many such like things of great Cost and Charge, besides their Banquets of Sweet-meats and other Junkets, as Cakes, Wafers, Biskets, Jellies, and the like, as also such strong Drinks[.]

For Cavendish it was the patriarchal ideal of the child which should have been the focus of a mother's attention, for the whole purpose of pregnancy was the securing of inheritance and social order. She therefore berated women who 'when they are brought to Bed, and up from their Lying in, they seem nothing so well Pleased, nor so Proud, as when they were great with Child'.[17] For Cavendish, then, pregnancy should be perceived as a time to prepare for motherhood, not a state to be proud of for its own sake. Cavendish was scathing in her refusal to tolerate the extravagant preparations of a layette, presumably preferring a more discrete approach. In fact, being seen to make adequate arrangements for a newborn's arrival at this time was an important, and as will be discussed below, legally vital, part of the initial performance of the very maternity Cavendish sought to privilege.

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[15] Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, pp. 94-5.
[16] Hilda L. Smith, 'Claims to Orthodoxy: How Far Can we Trust Margaret Cavendish's Autobiography?' in *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish*, ed. by Brandie R Seigfried and Lisa T Sarasohn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 15-26 (p. 22).
[17] Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, pp. 95-6.

Diagnosing Pregnancy

The impenetrability of the secrets of the pregnant belly was alluded to in all genres of early modern literature. Fears about what was happening in the opaque belly permeated all aspects of life in early modern society, as Cathy McClive noted in 2002, using many court cases as evidence.[18] The paradigmatic position as demonstrated in *Sociable Letters* was a hope that the pregnancy would produce a son, but the first problem was to determine if the woman was pregnant at all. As Cavendish noted, a marriage of four weeks was not long enough for a woman at this time to say with any confidence that she was pregnant. Midwife Jane Sharp lamented that young women like Lady S. M. were particularly hard to diagnose as pregnant because

> Young women especially of their first Child, are so ignorant commonly, that they cannot tell whether they have conceived or not, and not one of twenty almost keeps a just account, else they would be better provided against the time of their lying in, and not so suddenly be surprised as many of them are.[19]

Sharp noted that younger women not only failed to keep a note of the dates of their menstrual cycles, which would have helped them to know how far the pregnancy had progressed and when labour could be anticipated, but that they were ignorant in general about the significance of other symptoms. She then went on to list a large number of the signs of pregnancy which broadly map on to the ones offered in most medical text books. As Sharp pointed out, though, not all these signs would fit every woman but some of them would apply. The signs Sharp offered include a flatter than normal stomach as the womb contracted to nurture the seed, loss of appetite, and sour belching. The absence of menstruation is the sixth point on her list, followed by 'a preternatural desire to something not fit to eat nor drink, as some women with child have longed to bite off a piece of their Husbands Buttocks'.[20] This followed swollen or sore breasts, and mood swings, and the list ends with the description of a urine test in which live worms would appear in a filtered urine sample after it had stood for a few days.

The difficulty of a definite diagnosis of pregnancy forms part of a comedic interlude commissioned by William Cavendish, second earl of Devonshire from Ben Jonson to mark the christening of his second son, Charles in 1620. This was known as 'An Entertainment at

[18] Cathy McClive, 'The Hidden Truths of the Belly: The Uncertainties of Pregnancy in Early Modern Europe', *Social History of Medicine*, 15.2 (2002): 209-227.
[19] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 102.
[20] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 103.

Blackfriars' or the 'Cavendish Christening Entertainment', and it was performed at the Cavendish house in Blackfriars.[21] As an occasion piece it was designed as a one-off private performance. The playlet consists of a conversation between three 'gossips' a midwife, a wet-nurse, and a dry-nurse at the Christening itself, so is a self-conscious parody of the events it is commemorating.[22] The women all have type names with the wet-nurse being called 'Dugges', a slang term for breasts, the dry-nurse being called 'Kecks' or vomit, presumably as she was responsible for winding the baby after feeds, when positing (or the regurgitating of some milk) is normal, and the midwife 'Holdbacke', or a hindrance.[23] The midwife describes the pregnancy 'tests' she performed on 'my lady'. First she examined her breasts, then 'what past from her. With the white wine, and the Opall cloud and then my suffumigation'.[24] In common with the pregnancy signs that Sharp would later print, John Sadler's 1636 text *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-glass* described a urine test which is very much like what the fictional midwife suggests: 'The best clerks doe affirme that the urine of a woman with child is white and hath little motes [specks of dust], like those in the Sunne beames ascending and descending in it, and a clowd swimming aloft of an opall colour'.[25]

Diagnosis by urine, often done without a personal consultation with a patient, as Michael Stolberg as shown, was still popular with patients throughout the period, since 'diagnosing a patient from urine was firmly rooted in the medical tradition'.[26] This system was used for all manner of ailments, and involved diagnosis by the sight (the colour and clarity), taste, and smell. Despite the fact that this method of diagnosis was open to corruption on many levels, in a humoral context, the 'diagnostic judgements [of uroscopy-practising medics] simply made sense in the eyes of patients and relatives'.[27] Not everyone was convinced of the efficacy of this method of diagnosis, and in his attack on the idea, a Member of Parliament, Thomas Brian published a book exposing how untrained quacks and charlatans made the diagnosis by using their general knowledge and careful questioning of the patient to

[21] Fran C. Chalfant, *Ben Jonson's London: A Jacobean Placename Dictionary* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 42.
[22] Ben Jonson, 'Entertainment at Blackfriars', *Volume VII The Sad Shepherd, The Fall of Mortimer, Masques and Entertainments*, ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), pp. 765-778. I would like to thank Dr Gillian Spraggs for drawing the 'Entertainment' by Ben Jonson to my attention.
[23] 'Kecks' is not in the *OED* in this sense but its meaning is clear from later texts such as *Dr. Willis's Practice of Physick* (London. 1684) which describes how as that 'we presently keck or vomit' (p. 3).
[24] Jonson, 'Entertainment at Blackfriars', p. 772.
[25] John Sadler, *The Sicke Woman's Private Looking-glass* (London: Anne Griffin, 1636), p. 143.
[26] Michael Stolberg, *Uroscopy in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 84.
[27] Stolberg, *Uroscopy*, p. 91.

determine the answer, not by examining the urine.[28] The urine, then, was effectively a prop. Brian's book *The Pisse-Prophet* described how a maid might be sent with her mistress's urine to determine if the lady was pregnant. To discern this, Brian described how he would ask the maid how regular her mistress's menstrual cycles were: if she 'have her naturall courses monthly or no or when she had them'.[29] Upon learning that she had not menstruated for ten weeks and that 'this token (which is the most certain of all the rest) agreeing with other figures of conception', he would conclude the patient to be ten weeks pregnant. But so as not to give away the fact that it was the other evidence that showed this, the quack would phrase it as 'a quarter gone with child'.[30] So while Sharp's diagnostic list did include a urine test describing how

> If you keep her water three dayes close stopt in a glass, and then strain it through a fine linnen cloth, you will find live worms in the cloth. Also a needle laid twenty four hours in her Urine, will be full of red spots if she have conceived, or otherwise it will be black or dark coloured[,][31]

its placement last on the list, perhaps indicates a degree of scepticism from Sharp as to its effectiveness or necessity.

The fictional midwife's reference to 'suffumigation' is to the process of sending herbal fumes into the womb from below, often used to treat infertility from ancient times. As Jennifer Evans has explained, fumes were used to carry a range of therapeutic herbs and scents such as civet, and could also be applied to pessaries, or in some cases a man's penis directly before intercourse.[32] The midwife, then, was trying to sound knowledgeable while revealing her ignorance. Thus, it is significant then that Jonson's interlude omitted any allusion to an absence of menstruation as part of the midwife's diagnostic processes, despite *The Pisse-prophet*'s note that it was the most certain sign of pregnancy. This disinclination to refer to menstruation in performance is, as I have shown elsewhere, the same in John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633) when Putana informs Giovanni of his sister's pregnancy, such as 'qualms and water-pangs [...] queasiness of stomachs, pukings' but tellingly goes on to allude to menstruation only obliquely, when she says 'and another thing that I could name'.[33]

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[28] Louis Rosenfeld, *Four Centuries of Clinical Chemistry* (London: CRC Press, 1999), p. 10.
[29] Thomas Brian, *The Pisse-prophet: Or Certaine Pisse-pot Lectures* (London: R. Thrale, 1637), pp. 50-1.
[30] Brian, *The Pisse-prophet*, pp. 52-53.
[31] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 104.
[32] Jennifer Evans, 'Female Barrenness, Bodily Access and Aromatic Treatments in Seventeenth-Century England', *Historical Research* 87.237 (2014) 423-443.
[33] Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p. 181.

In ‘Entertainment’, the conversation then moves on to how to know the sex of the child. The midwife sees the question as a challenge to her authority and claimed that even without her prognostic equipment, she could still tell from the shape of the lady’s belly that the child was lying on its right side, the mother’s right breast was also larger and the milk squeezed from it sank to the bottom of a glass of water, all of which allowed her with confidence to say that the pregnancy was a boy. Ideas about boys being formed on the right side of the body came down from ancient works and endured throughout this time; Sharp too commented that ‘For the most part Boys are bred in the right side of it [the womb], and Girles in the left’.[34] The idea of the privileging of the right side of the body when carrying a boy was so culturally embedded that the performance of a pregnant woman rising from her bed was analysed for signs of the sex of the child. In the interlude, too, the midwife noted that the Countess stepped out with her ‘right foote, foremost’ confirming the evidence of a boy.[35] Brian, the pisse-prophet claimed that he always diagnosed the pregnancy as being with a boy but that he kept an excuse readily available should he be proved wrong, that the urine should have been brought to him sooner, when it was still warm, or again when the woman was further into her pregnancy. If he proved correct then he would waste no time in publicising the effectiveness of his practice.[36] ‘Entertainment’ ends by restating the assembly’s pleasure at a male birth and how it is a good reason for a banquet. The speaker wished the Countess ‘A Boy for my ladye then everye yeere / crye wee, for a Girle will afforde us but beere’.[37] As such the interlude both reinforced cultural norms but was one which offered a tantalising, albeit parodic, glimpse into the way the opaque pregnant body was perceived by those intimately acquainted with it. Normally, mothers did not attend the christening of their children as this happened during the lying-in period, the time when mothers were expected to have bed-rest to recover, but in this text midwife Holdbacke directly addresses ‘the Countess’ and welcomes her to the production.[38] How far the drollery of the interlude mirrored the Countess’s perception of her recently pregnant self is of course impossible to say.

Maternal Imagination

As discussed earlier, one of the reasons that unrequited maternal longings were thought potentially damaging to a pregnancy was because it was believed that the mother’s imagination could exert power over the foetus. Explanations for the working of the maternal

[34] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 38.
[35] Jonson, ‘Entertainment at Blackfriars’, p. 773.
[36] Brian, *The Pisse-prophet*, pp. 52-53.
[37] Jonson, ‘Entertainment at Blackfriars’, p. 778.
[38] Jonson, ‘Entertainment at Blackfriars’, p. 769.

imagination go back to the Hippocratic corpus, and the stories told therein were widely repeated in the seventeenth-century medical texts.[39] Jane Sharp explained that

> the efficient cause of Monsters, is either from the forming faculty in the Seed, or else the strength of imagination joyned with it; add to these the menstruous blood and the disposition of the Matrix; sometimes the mother is frighted or conceives wonders, or longs strangely for things not to be had, and the child is markt accordingly by it.[40]

Everything from a major birth abnormality, sometimes called a monstrous birth, to a relatively minor one such as a birth mark could be put down to unfulfilled maternal longings in the right circumstances. One of the main stories told about the effects of female imagination was repeated by Sharp too when she described how '*Galen* taught an *Aethiopian* to get a white child, setting a picture before him for his wife to look on'.[41]As Mary Fissell has commented, it would be anachronistic to read connotations of racism on to tale such as this as the story was told with the opposite outcome in other literature.[42] Indeed, it could also be transferred on to people of other European nationalities. Ben Jonson's epigram 88 'On English Monsieur', as Rebecca Ann Bach has pointed out, mocks the English who enjoyed wearing French fashions.[43] The poem suggests that this was a French affectation from a man whose 'whole body speaks French but not he' which might have been the result of the subject's father having 'hung some monsieur's picture on the wall, / By which his dam conceived him clothes and all'.[44] Bach has further suggested that this is an 'animalistic' response on the part of the mother to the sight of an 'early modern pin-up', and while it is a classic satire on the supposed powers of the maternal imagination, underpinning it is indeed the idea that women were less developed intellectually than men, and so more prone to visceral responses that could affect the outcome of pregnancy.[45]

A short story posthumously ascribed to Restoration playwright Aphra Behn is inspired by this idea.[46] 'The Dumb Virgin: Or the Force of Imagination' (1700), has maternal imagination as its theme. The unnamed wife of Rinaldo, a Venetian senator, loses her young

[39] Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 207.
[40] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, pp. 118-19.
[41] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 122.
[42] Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, p. 207.
[43] Rebecca Ann Bach, 'Domestic Travel and Social Mobility', in *Ben Jonson in Context*, ed. by Julie Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 263-70 (p. 265).
[44] Ben Jonson, '*Epigrams* 88' in *Ben Jonson in Context*, p. 264, lines 11-12.
[45] Bach, 'Domestic Travel and Social Mobility', p.264.
[46] Since the anthology was a posthumous publication the ascription of the texts to Behn is uncertain. See Leah Orr, 'Attribution Problems in the Fiction of Aphra Behn', *Modern Language Review* 108.1 (2013), pp. 30-51. Orr explains how part of the puzzle of attribution, as discussed by Germaine Greer, is founded in the publisher Simon Briscoe with whom Behn had no known connection in life (p. 34).

son as a consequence of a pirate attack around the time that she had conceived her second child. While the pregnancy assuages the parents' grief, this comfort is dashed when the baby proves to be a girl, Belvideera. Moreover the child is disabled: 'its limbs were distorted, its back bent, and tho the face was the freest from deformity, yet it had no beauty to recompense the dis-symetry of the other parts'.[47] The attending physicians ascribe this to the 'frights and dismal apprehensions of the Mother, at her being taken by the Pyrates'. Yet another child is conceived but due to the nature of the mother's grief and her hardly speaking during the pregnancy, this daughter, named Maria, although beautiful, had no power of speech. As the narrator explains, 'which defect the learn'd attributed to the silence and melancholy of the Mother, as the deformity of the other was to the extravagance of her frights'.[48]

While these are the obvious examples of the 'force of the imagination' as set out in the title of the narrative, there is a further one. When the daughters are grown, Maria falls in love with man who turns out to be her long-lost brother Cosmo. He is only identified by his father, having been caught in a compromising position by the woman who would turn out to be his sister, by the 'mark of a Bloody dagger on his Neck under his left ear'.[49] It is not explicitly linked in the text as an effect of maternal imagination on the man, in the ways that the subsequent pregnancies are subject to this phenomenon, but this would have been the most likely assumption of the early modern reader. Sharp provided a medical explanation for this in the quotation given above. Again, this was transmitted into the wider population and autobiographer Alice Thornton recorded the consequences for her pregnancy of being frightened by a penknife:

> I was pretty big of him [Robert, her seventh child] of a fright which came upon me by a surprize of the sight of a penknife which was nigh to have hurt me. The fear and dread apprehension thereof did cause a marke of deepe bloody couler upon the child's heart, most pure and distinct, and of severall shapes, contineuing soe as no thing could washe them of[f].[50]

The birthmark on Thornton's child looked like it was a cut from the penknife, complete with little droplets of blood surrounding it. Referring to this incident Olivia Weisser has commented that '[t]he powerful ways women's emotions were believed to alter their bodies

[47] Aphra Behn, 'The Dumb Virgin: Or the Force of Imagination' (1700), in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, Volume 3, ed. by Janet Todd (London: William Pickering, 1995), pp. 335-360 (p. 344).
[48] Ibid.
[49] Behn, 'The Dumb Virgin: Or the Force of Imagination', p. 358.
[50] Alice Thornton, *The Autobiography of Alice Thornton*, ed. by Charles Jackson (London: Mitchell and Hughes. 1875), p. 140.

internally defined a dangerous and unruly imagination as a particularly female problem'; and this notion is transferred onto fictional characters too.[51] It is only this marker of the mother's imagination on the long-lost son which reveals the incestuous relationship. So by reading the 'The Dumb Virgin' in a broader context it is possible to read the pregnant body as having performed more instances of the 'force of the imagination' than would be the case without being aware of this wider medical context.

While several texts depict women as taking advantage of a fear of the power of the maternal imagination on their developing babies, the obvious downside of this fear was the lengths of control and management a pregnant woman was subject to, to prevent harm. Women were expected to conduct themselves in ways which made them beyond reproach because ultimately the logical extrapolation of the power of this imagination on the appearance of the child was explained by Sadler 'the children of an adulteress may be like unto her owne husband though begotten by another man; which is caused by the force of the imagination'.[52] Michelle Ephraim makes the convincing case that it is this which underpins Leontes' jealousy in *The Winter's Tale.* He muses upon whether he is even the father of his son Mamillius 'No bourn 'twixt his and mine, yet were it true / To say this boy were like me' (1.2.136-37).[53] Given the difficulty of performing and being perceived to be without reproach throughout a pregnancy, then demanding special attention in the form of treats and whims as Cavendish's Lady S. M. does is arguably part of a broader performance of a pregnancy, demonstrating concern for the well-being of your progeny.

Unwanted Pregnancies

While the birth of a wanted son could facilitate the celebration such as in Jonson's production, not every pregnancy was wanted. Alice Thornton recorded candidly in her autobiography how when she found herself pregnant once again at the age of forty, she would

[51] Olivia Weisser, *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 97.
[52] Sadler, *The Sicke Womans Private Looking Glasse*, p. 138.
[53] Michelle Ephraim, 'Hermione's Suspicious Body; Adultery and Superfetation in *The Winter's Tale*' in *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, ed by Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007), pp. 45-58(p. 49). As Victoria Sparey has also argued, calling the boy Mamillius is provocative, carrying with it as it does the connotations of mammary or the breast. This arguably demonstrates that the child's post-birth characteristics were influenced by his mother's behaviour as she nursed him <http://earlymodernmedicine.com/a-mothers-milk/> [accessed 25 October 2015]. See also Sparey, 'Identity-Formation and the Breastfeeding Mother in Renaissance Generative Discourses and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*', *Social History of Medicine* (2012) 25 (4): 777-794.

rather not have had this happen. She rationalised her pregnancy through a recourse to her faith, writing that: 'if it had bin good in the eyes of my God I should rather [...] not to have bin in this condittion. But it is not a Christian's part to chuse anything of this nature'.[54] The notion that a Christian should submit to God's will in matters related to conception is a typical position and devotional books would offer prayers to use in pregnancy to ask for God's help for a successful outcome for any pregnancy. [55] However, the reasons for a woman to regret being pregnant were many. In Thornton's case, she had already been through the ordeal of several difficult pregnancies and labours and felt exhausted physically and spiritually by these events. Other women feared damaging their looks. Lady Mary Rich, for example, came to regret how as a young mother she and her husband had decided to stop at two children because of anxieties over finance but also from her vanity at the prospect of spoiling her figure.[56] This concern is picked up on in fiction too. In *The London Jilt*, Cornelia regrets an unplanned pregnancy, firstly by joking about her concerns about the labour, but also the effects on her figure:

> It is certain that I was not over-joyed; for I imagined, that this would not come out so commodiously, nor so easily as it went in; and that my Beauty, which I was provided with after a reasonable passable manner, would receive great Injury thereby.[57]

That pregnancy spoilt women's figures is recurs in an eighteenth-century fiction, *The Virgin Unmask'd.* The conversation between an elderly aunt and her niece has the aunt remark, 'I have said nothing of the Personal, and Bodily Sufferings, that attend Matrimony; and if Women are not Barren, are inseparable from it. I have not spoke of losing your Shape, the Fading of your Beauty, which I know you value'.[58]

The implications of an unplanned and apparently unwanted pregnancy are explored in another of the short stories ascribed to Aphra Behn: 'The Adventure of the Black Lady'. The eponymous 'black lady', Bellamora, arrives in London from the Hampshire countryside in a 'ruined' state, in advanced pregnancy, with the intention of lodging with a cousin for six

[54] Thornton, *The Autobiography of Alice Thornton*, pp. 164-65.
[55] Delores LaPratt, 'Childbirth Prayers in Medieval and Early Modern England: "For drede of perle that may befalle."' *Symposia,* 2 (2010) via < http://symposia.library.utoronto.ca> [last accessed May 2015].
[56] Mary, Countess of Warwick, *The Autobiography of Mary Countess of Warwick*, ed. by Thomas Crofton Crocker (London: Percy Society, 1848; Kessinger facsimile reprint, 2009), pp. 32-33.
[57] [Anon.], *The London Jilt: Or the Politick* Whore, ed by Charles H. Hinnant (Calgary: Broadview, 2007), p. 81.
[58] Bernard Mandeville, *The Virgin Unmask'd, Or, Female Dialogues, Betwixt an Elderly Maiden Lady, and Her Niece, on Several Diverting Discourses on Love, Marriage, Memoirs and Morals, etc. of All Times* (London, 1709), p. 119. My thanks to Dr Katie Aske for alerting me to this text.

months, undetected by her 'Friends [family] in the Country'.[59] In this respect the story inverts the more usual scenario where a country girl is innocent and goes on to be corrupted in the city.[60] Unable to locate her cousin, Bellamora takes lodgings with a 'good, discreet, ancient Gentlewoman, who was fallen into a little decay'.[61] The implication here is that the gentlewoman has a financial imperative to be discrete for her lodgers.

Small hints as to Bellamora's pregnancy are planted in the text early on with a depiction of how her drink of choice was difficult to procure: Bellamora desires a 'Pint of Sack, which, with some little Difficulty, was at last allow'd her'.[62] However the next day the full situation is made clear when, finding her in floods of tears, Bellamora confides her situation and her seduction by Mr Fondlove to her landlady, revealing, 'I am great with Child by him (Madam) and wonder you did not perceive it last Night'.[63] Bellamora describes how she was seduced by her suitor who took advantage of her vulnerability having found her alone in her chamber, and pleading with her to submit. While by any measure the inducement to intercourse shows that this was not freely consensual, the fact that Bellamora conceived as a result relieved Fondlove of any accusation of rape. As Jennifer Evans has explained, sexual desire and pleasure was thought necessary to open the neck of the womb to allow ingress of the male seed.[64] More than this, under the Galenic two seed model of fertility, parties needed to emit seed for conception, as a posthumous edition of *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives* explains:

> Conception is of fruitful seed spent by a man, and mixed with a womans seed to perfection for the making of a child by the retentive and altering faculty of the womb; hence it is necessary that both seeds be fruitful, that is, hot, full of Spirits, and well tempered, and a fit subject for a Soul, and that both spend at a time, and there be mixed and retained together, to produce a child.[65]

The downside of a belief in which both parties needed to experience pleasure to release seed was that 'pregnancy was enough to disprove rape because the victim must have experienced

[59] Aphra Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady' (1698), in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, Volume 3, ed. by Janet Todd (London: William Pickering, 1995), pp. 313-320 (p. 315).
[60] The fact that Bellamora is looking for lodgings in Bridge Street, an area notorious for prostitution emphasises this. Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', note 2, p. 462.
[61] Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', p. 315.
[62] Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', p. 316.
[63] Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', p. 318.
[64] Evans, 'Female Barrenness', p. 440.
[65] Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives* (London, 1676), pp. 131-32.

pleasure'.[66] However, while useful as a plot device, Jane Sharp's midwifery guide moderated this view when it explained that

> Some say again the cause of barrenness is want of love in man and wife, whose Seed never mixeth as it should to Procreation of children, their hatred is so great [...] and this extream hatred is the reason why women seldom or never conceive when they are ravished, and it proves as ineffectual as *Onan*'s Seed when he spilt it upon the ground.[67]

The inclusion of 'seldom' to the typical explanation shows that Sharp at least had some reservations about the possibility of women not getting pregnant from rape. However, in another inversion of the paradigmatic story, Fondlove does actually want to marry her, an offer she declined doubting his sincerity. This theme appears in the early eighteenth-century short novel *The Forced Virgin; or the Unnatural Mother*, although the scene is of a violent rape by a would-be lover, rather than a pressurised seduction. Lominia, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, is kidnapped by a rival lover, who tells her that her lover, Arastes, was fatally injured in the attack, and she is raped. Lominia's fear and hatred for her attacker is shown when as soon as he is satisfied and declares that he considers Lominia his wife, she answers him with, 'Thee, Traitor! [...] What shall the Ruiner of my Peace, the most detested Fiend of Fiends, triumph o'er my Fall, and in my Parents view? No, thou damned Monster'.[68] Lominia then stabs and kills her assailant with his own dagger. A few weeks later, however, Lominia 'began to feel the weighty Burthen of *Lysanor*'s filthy Embraces, the dreadful Product of her destructive Ravishment', proving she is one of the exceptions to the rule as identified by Sharp, an exception which was to be repeated further in the story.[69]

Returning to 'The Black Lady', when confessing her pregnancy to her landlady, Bellamora reveals that she is in the last stages of her pregnancy, 'Alas! I have not a Month to go'.[70] The landlady naturally asks Bellamora what 'Provisions have you made for the Reception of the young Stranger that you carry about you [?]', at which Bellamora reveals the second tragedy that she has lost all her money on her journey around London.[71] By coincidence, the other lodger at this house is Mr Fondlove's sister, who on hearing of the lack of provision for the child, in secret 'went to the Exchange and bought Child-bed linen'.[72]

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[66] Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 19.
[67] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 99.
[68] [Anon.], *The Forced Virgin; or the Unnatural Mother: A True Secret History* (London: W. Trott, 1730), p. 16.
[69] [Anon.], *The Forced Virgin*, p. 22.
[70] Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', p. 318.
[71] Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', p. 318.
[72] Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', p. 319.

This might seem an odd thing to do for a woman she barely knew, but in early modern England failing to provide a proper layette for an new baby could have serious consequences should the baby not survive its birth: in the case of a late miscarriage or stillbirth having concealed your pregnancy and not made any provision for it led to a presumption in law of infanticide. The punishment for this was death by hanging. The law enacted in 1624 specifically legislated for the murder of illegitimate children such as Bellamora's. The law reads as follows:

> Whereas many lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children, to avoid their shame, and to escape punishment, do secretly bury or conceal the death of their children, and after, if the child be found dead, the said women do alledge, that the said child was born dead; whereas it falleth out sometimes (altho' it is hard to be proved) that the said child or children were murdered by the said women their lewd mothers.[73]

While in fact there were very few prosecutions for infanticide, it was the case that almost all the prosecutions were of unmarried women.[74] And there is evidence that the courts were sometimes sympathetic to a woman found guilty of this crime, but it is clear that the subtext of Fondlove's sister rushing out for provisions for the child is undoubtedly a dramatic presentation of this fear which was especially acute at the end of the seventeenth century when there was a lot of popular concern about the abandonment and destruction of unwanted babies. This may have been prompted by the perceived crisis caused by stagnant population figures at this time.[75] Indeed around this time the idea that special hospitals should be set up to care for unwanted children began to be mooted. Alan MacFarlane has described how in the 1690s a midwife, 'Mrs. Cellier, who was one of the first to advocate the setting up of special hospitals, warned of "the great number (of children) which are overlaid, and wilfully murdered, by their wicked and cruel mothers"'.[76] This internal evidence from the text might help support the hypothesis that the short story was composed nearer to its very late seventeenth century publication date than with Behn's oeuvre.

The contemporary late seventeenth-century interest in infanticide and its consequences provides a further urgency to the narrative which can only be explained in context. There would be a concern that the anxiety that Bellamora was experiencing would precipitate an early labour and this necessitated having made full provision for the baby more

[73] Cited in Alan MacFarlane, *The History of Infanticide in England*, pp. 2-3. <http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/savage/A-INFANT.PDF> [accessed 25 march 2012].
[74] Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 132.
[75] Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 25.
[76] Alan MacFarlane, *The History of Infanticide in England*, pp. 2-3.

expedient. The reason this was such a big concern was that it was almost universally accepted that a baby born at eight months' gestation would not live. The explanations for this go back to ancient times, and are explained in *The Midwives Book*:

> A child born in six months is not perfect and must die, but one born in seven months is perfect, but one born in the eight month cannot live, because in the seventh month the child useth all its force to come out, and if it cannot, it must stay two months longer to recover the strength lost upon the former attempt that had made it too feeble to get forth in the eighth month, for if it come not forth at the seventh month it removes its station and changeth itself to some other place in the womb; these two motions have so weakened it, that it must stay behind a month longer, for if it come forth before, it is almost impossible for it to live.[77]

Bellamora is clear when she arrives at the boarding house that she had 'not a month to go', so would be considered at risk of an unviable baby should she deliver before the month was out.

In an attempt to force her to marry Fondlove before the baby is born, Fondlove's sister and the landlady threaten Bellamora with 'the Overseers of the poor'. The local parish was financially liable for paying the midwife's bill in the cases of destitute women.[78] Parishes were notoriously reluctant to commit to paying the long term costs of supporting the mother of an illegitimate child.[79] The women suggest that after the birth Bellamora would be sent to the 'House of Correction' with the child put out to a parish-nurse. The gentlewomen use this fact to frighten Bellamora, who as a 'Person of her Youth, Beauty, Education, Family and Estate' was unused to rough treatment.[80] Bellamora holds out for a further three weeks, keeping to her room, until the secret is well known in the local area and the authorities are alerted to their potential charge. Bellamora's future sister-in-law and her landlady contact Fondlove and have him standing by to marry her. That Bellamora was at the worrying eight month stage of her pregnancy is reconfirmed in the narrative as Bellamora stays in seclusion for 'above three weeks' so that the household servants were not alerted her pregnant state.[81] However, at the end of this time, and just before the parish intervenes, Fondlove is revealed and Bellamora agrees to marry him. Her subsequent, timely delivery is only alluded to with the closing metaphor of the black cat queening as the newlyweds are out of the building.

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[77] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 146.
[78] David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 64.
[79] Anne-Marie Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain, c. 1600 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p. 37.
[80] Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', p. 319.
[81] Behn, 'The Adventure of the Black Lady', pp. 319-20.

Procured Abortion

There has been much speculation critically about whether Ophelia's distribution of rue in *Hamlet* could be an allusion to an abortion she had or was about to procure.[82] Rue was well-known for its powerful abortifacient qualities. It is clear, however that in these much later literary works the topic of abortion was dealt with openly as an, albeit illegal and dangerous, alternative to carrying an unplanned baby. For most people at this time it seems that the abortion of an unwanted pregnancy was not an option they could countenance. Even in the 1683 scandal-fiction *The London Jilt*, the prostitute Cornelia, someone who was living beyond acceptable norms of decency, ruled this out when she finds herself pregnant: 'But since such was the State of Affairs, and that I could not hinder the Progress but by wicked and unlawful means', she resolved to tell one of her clients about the pregnancy.[83] However, the fact that regular menstruation was seen as so optimal for women's reproductive health meant that medical treatises were packed with recipes to provoke a late menstrual period. This means that there was the possibility that women who suspected a missed period was a pregnancy did have access to recipes to provoke the period and thus cause an abortion. Indeed, as Etienne van de Walle has identified, eighty of the 325 plants recommended in Culpeper's *Complete Herbal* (1655) could be used to provoke menstruation.[84] Jane Sharp knew the possibility of using emmenogues to procure abortion when she cautioned 'do none of these things to women with child, for that will be Murder'.[85] The plethora of knowledge about menstruation- provoking herbs did not mean that women routinely obtained covert abortions in this way. Indeed, Jennifer Evans has argued that more frequently these herbal cures were used in the hope of an aphrodisiac quality which would have the effect of increasing the birth rate. [86] The opening of the womb that could cause an abortion is the same opening that was thought necessary to admit the male seed.

The theme of taking abortifacient herbs is one which does occur in literary pregnancies however. It is alluded to a short lyric poem, found in a manuscript commonplace

[82] For one recent example, see Alex Gradwohl, 'Herbal Abortifacients and their Classical Heritage in Tudor England', *Penn History Review*, 20.1 (2013) 44-71 (45).
[83] [Anon.], *The London Jilt*, p. 81.
[84] 'Flowers and Fruit: Two Thousand Years of Menstrual Regulation', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 28 (1997), 183-202 (p. 194).
[85] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 296.
[86] Jennifer Evans, '"Gentle Purges corrected with hot spices, whether they work of not, do vehemently provoke Venery": Menstrual Provocation and Procreation in Early Modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 25.1 (2012), 2-19.

book which is astonishing in the ways that it addresses the matter of abortion directly.[87] The title, 'Said by a young Lady to her Child Taking Something to Destroy it' makes it clear that the mother who has given in to 'lawless' or extramarital sexual activity knows what to take in this circumstance and is about to induce an abortion. The poem reads as follows:

> Thou that thy life ere thy birth must loose
> Twixt nothing and a being mixture of Extremes
> Unfinished Embrio whom both states refuse
> As eatch too perfect or Imperfect deemes
> Got when my passion honours laws orecame
> Condemned to Death by its severe decree
> Unhappie product of my lawless flame
> Thou must the victime of my honour bee
> Dye to prevent thy Cruell mothers Shame
> But doing so forget you ere were mine
> And when returned to Chaos whence you came
> Tell not the shades the horror of my Crime
> To love and Honnour all mankindes a slave
> Whose rigid laws none nobly can decline
> Blame love then who th'imperfect being gave
> And Tyrant Honour that doth thy death designe

The poem states that the foetus is condemned to die because of the social expectations on woman as chaste. The foetus is described as an 'unfinished Embrio' which suggests it is at the pre-quickening stage (before it was felt to move *in utero*, normally around the four month stage) and so the pregnancy was to be ended at the sort of stage where it could be passed off as retained menses. Similarly in the anonymous early eighteenth-century story, *The Forced Virgin*, Lominia decides to end her pregnancy by means of 'those Herbs which promote Abortion' taken in a 'fatal Juice'.[88] As John Richetti has noted, Lominia's agency here is unusual, 'Heroines usually do abort ill-begotten babes but because of involuntary agitation'.[89] While a spontaneous abortion (or miscarriage) caused by mental perturbation would be accepted as reasonable by people at this time, since shocks or upsets were given as the main cause of this, in fiction the pregnant woman, as Christine Blouch has noted, was more regularly 'cast out from her family and forced into religion, seclusion, starvation or

[87] 'Said by a young Lady to her Child Taking Something to Destroy it', Leeds University Library Brotherton Collection MS Lt 10, p. 43; available in a modern anthology, *Restoration Literature: An Anthology*, ed. by Paul Hammond (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2002), pp. 297-98. The authorship is unknown, but the commonplace book it is in is inscribed 'John Boys his book, given to him by his Mother August 11 1733'. The book is in various hands.
[88] [Anon.], *The Forced Virgin*, p. 23.
[89] John Richetti, 'Popular Narrative in the Early Eighteenth Century: Formats and Formulas', in *The English Novel, Volume One 1700-Fielding*, ed by Richard W. F. Kroll (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 70-106 (p. 91).

prostitution'.[90] This is certainly the implication at the start of 'The Black Lady' when Bellamora finds herself in the notorious part of London, despite the fact that she has taken the step of removing herself from the family before they find out the truth. In *The London Jilt*, while Cornelia felt it was too wicked to take abortifacient drugs, her baby son was born conveniently dead, killed 'by reason of the Compressions and Contorsions of my Body, seem'd so blew and deformed, that one could hardly perceive it had the Form of a humane Figure'.[91] Cornelia had perceived her pregnancy to be a threat to her figure, and hence her future income and so had dressed in tight lacing and bands during her pregnancy to try to mitigate this.

The Forced Virgin offers a vivid account of the side effects of taking abortifacient herbs, as Lominia experiences both hot sweats and shivering cold, and is in considerable pain. While the abortifacient drugs did work, Lominia was to find herself pregnant from a second rape in the following weeks. This time, her long-term lover, who had grown impatient with her refusal to marry him, drugs her with opiates: '*Arastes*, overjoyed at the Success of his Design, snatched up the Captivated Fair, laid her on the adjacent Bed and performed the Act his Desires had long urged him to'.[92] When, several months later, Lominia realises she is pregnant again, and assumes that the abortion was not effective after all. She thus confides in her friend Clarina and alters her clothing to conceal the advanced pregnancy.[93]

The use of clothing to disguise pregnancy is a recurrent one in literature from the Renaissance onwards. One satirical poem commented that 'bastards sprout, / might Arses greate at first begin' which 'these hoopes did helpe to hide their sin'. [94] In a short episode in Richard Head's *The English Rogue* the eponymous character flees from a household servant he has made pregnant advising her that he will return to marry her, but that in the meantime she should 'lace her self very straight, and keep down her growing Belly with two or three Busks'.[95] Eliza Haywood's eponymous protagonist Fantomina also disguises her pregnancy

[90] Christine Blouch, 'What Ann Lang Read: Eliza Haywood and her Readers' in *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*, ed by Kirsten T. Saxton (University Press of Kentucky, 2015), pp. 300-326 (p. 315).
[91] [Anon.], *The London Jilt*, p. 83.
[92] [Anon.], *The Forced Virgin*, p. 26.
[93] A similar storyline was published three years earlier in Mary Davy's *The Acomplish'd Rake* which Miss Friendly was drugged and raped by Sir John.
[94] [Anon.], *Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentle-women: Or A Glasse, to View the Pride of Vainglorious Women* (London: 1595) (lines (157-60).
[95] Richard Head, *The English Rogue, containing a Brief Discovery of the most Eminent Cheats, Robberies and other Extravagancies by him Committed* (London, 1688), p. 9. Busks were a wooden panel worn, often covered in embroidery, and worn down the front of a corset as a stiffening device.

by ‘eating little, lacing prodigiously strait, and the Advantage of a great Hoop-Petticoat’.[96] In due course, Clarina helped Lominia to deliver a boy and took it to be left to die on wasteland on Lominia’s orders.[97] Arastes had been keeping watch on Lominia knowing her to be pregnant, and rescued the exposed child and took it to a foster mother. The story ends with the protagonist’s suicide only after she has killed the child when it was three years old after a chance encounter and still believing it to be her rapist Lysanor’s child.

Conclusion

Monika Karpinska has made the astute point that one of the reasons dramatic works find the theme of the pregnant female body so compelling is that during pregnancy

> The ‘two become one’ of marriage is reversed within the female body where ‘one becomes two’. As a result, representations of pregnant women endow them with nearly magical properties that, once again, make the connection between women and the natural world explicit.[98]

As Karpinska further noted, the ability of the female body to reproduce is at its most fundamental level a disruption to patriarchal paradigms of the husband and wife as one body. Therefore ‘this distrust of the wife, manifested most commonly by a fear of cuckoldry, has its roots in the inherent distrust and imagined betrayal of the body itself’.[99] This distrust is the impetuous behind *The Batchelars Banquet* which begins its discussion of the humours of a pregnant woman by mocking men who are foolish enough to believe they have fathered their own child: ‘There is another humour incident to woman, when her husband sees her belly to grow big (though by peradventure by the help of some other friend) yet he persuades himself it is a work of his own framing’.[100] But more than this, these texts like Cavendish’s sociable letter too find that pregnancy is a time when the patriarchal norms are subverted and women could use this to their advantage by making unreasonable demands. Similarly, later in the seventeenth century the prostitute Cornelia is depicted inverting the trope of using clothes to disguise a pregnancy and instead arranges her corset so that it made her ‘Belly swell bravely’ such that she could have ‘deceived the cunningest Midwife in all the town’, and thereby

[96] Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina and Other Works*, ed. by Alexander Pettit, Margaret Croskery, and Anna C. Patchias (Plymouth: Broadview, 2004), p. 32.
[97] [Anon.], *The Forced Virgin*, p. 28.
[98] Karpinska, ‘Early Modern Dramatizations of Virgins and Pregnant Women’, pp. 438-39.
[99] Karpinska, ‘Early Modern Dramatizations of Virgins and Pregnant Women’, p. 439.
[100] Dekker, *The Batchelars Banquet*, sig B3.

tricking a client who wanted a child by her.[101] Again narrating how it was impossible to know the secrets of the female belly with any confidence. The prostitute Cornelia even nods to the way that 'Silly' women attempt this deception with cushions, which is referred to in plays such as in Doll Tearsheet in Henry IV part 2, for example. Texts like the 'Entertainment' and the *Pisse-Pot Lectures* also show an obsession with 'seeing' into the opaque mysteries of the woman's body. Dekker's satire too is concerned with trying to take back power from the secrets of the body, mocking birth attendants and refiguring the birthing room as a site not of female co-operation but of bitchiness and power battles. In this respect the themes of distrust and cuckoldry can be seen in prose fiction much the same as in dramatic pieces.

That stories about the consequences of unplanned pregnancies should appear in the newly burgeoning field of prose fiction after the Restoration perhaps reflects the fact that there was a general perception at the time that there was an increase in immorality, and an emphasis on sex for pleasure, in the population in general. While Anne-Marie Kilday has argued that the reality and the number of illegitimate births, which does rise slightly in the second half of the seventeenth century, and infanticide cases does not bear this out, it is clear that there was a contemporary concern about this.[102] This adds a further dimension to our understandings of late seventeenth century culture in which there were concurrent concerns about population stagnation. However, this links back again to patriarchal concerns about this – illegitimate births would not solve the perceived population crisis as they fell outside the rules of inheritance and social order. This why Fondlove uses inheritance as a weapon in his campaign to force Bellamora to marry him before the baby is born. Short stories and novellas seem to provide an appropriate platform to explore the reactions of men and women to unwanted pregnancies. It is certainly the case, then, that by analysing a range of depictions of pregnant characters, told in different forms, in the way that Susan Wiseman advocated by using 'evidence from texts in a similar field' and other contemporary contextual material, such a medical texts, it is possible to obtain a deeper reading of the presentation of pregnancies in prose and poetic works too, which can in turn lead to a more profound appreciation of the varied ways that pregnancy was perceived in the early modern era.

[101] [Anon.], *The London Jilt*, p. 91.
[102] Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain*, pp. 32-33.